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NEWS from Paul Tsongas

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U.S. SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS

TSONGAS INTRODUCES RESOLUTION TO ALLEVIATE STARVATION IN EAST TIMOR

Senator Paul Tsongas, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee introduced a resolution today calling on the Reagan administration to encourage the government of Indonesia to change its policies relative to East Timor. Congressman Tony P. Hall (D-Ohio) has introduced a similar resolution on the House side.

The island of East Timor, a former Portugese colony, is next to Indonesian Archipelago, located in the Indian Ocean about 500 miles northwest of Australia. It was invaded by Indonesia in late 1975 and has since been the scene of warfare and large scale starvation and disease. According to Amnesty International, the Catholic Church, and other sources, upwards of 100,000 people on East Timor have perished as a result of these conditions.

Tsongas said that while there has been some improvement in the humanitarian situation recently, "there have been developments in recent months that underscore the need for further action."

"It is generally acknowledged that an Indonesian military offensive last year uprooted thousands of Timorese villagers and could still have serious consequences for the precarious food situation, " Tsongas said in a letter to colleagues. "There has also been little progress in alleviating the plight of Timorese who wish to join family members in Australia or Portugal. In most cases these people have been separated from their families for more than six years."

"I believe that a serious effort should be made to resolve this tragic situation." he continued. "A neutral international presence is needed in East Timor to protect the civilian population from further violence as well as to distribute food and medicine."

The Tsongas resolution would urge the U.S. government to request that Indonesia allow international relief organizations full-time access to the territory, allow free access to international journalists and human rights organizations, and to allow the appropriate international agencies to assist in family reunification.

Tsongas also wants the administration to encourage Indonesia to agree to withdraw their troops from the island. "There is a growing consensus that a just political solution is the only viable long-term answer to East Timor's plight. It would be in Indonesia's interest to allow East Timor to freely determine its own fate in accordance with international law."

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